

MINUTES OF CABINET MEETING HELD 23 FEBRUARY 2015

PRESENT

Cabinet Members: Councillor Cereste (Chairman), Councillor Holdich, Councillor Elsey, Councillor Fitzgerald, Councillor Hiller, Councillor North, Councillor Scott, Councillor Seaton and Councillor Serluca.

Cabinet Advisers: Councillor Casey and Councillor Lamb.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Cereste declared that he would not take part in the debate or vote on item 5, Future of Wind and Solar Projects, as he was a board member of Peterborough Renewable Energy Limited.

Councillor Holdich stated that he would not take part in the debate or vote on item 5, Future of Wind and Solar Projects, as his son-in-law was a board member of Peterborough Renewable Energy Limited.

3. MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 2 FEBRUARY 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2015 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

STRATEGIC DECISIONS

4. PETERBOROUGH CULTURE STRATEGY 2015 – 2020

Cabinet received a report from the Cabinet Member for City Centre Management and Tourism and the Cabinet Advisor for City Centre Management and Tourism.

It was advised that Culture and Leisure services were long established priorities of the Council and a Cultural Strategy had been published five years ago to deliver its priorities up to 2014.

Recognising the need to take a fresh look at its approach and priorities to develop a new culture strategy, the Council had developed a refreshed strategy, as set out within the document 'Peterborough Culture Strategy 2015-2020'.

The purpose of the report was for Cabinet to consider the refreshed strategy and to recommend its adoption to Council.

Councillor Casey introduced the report, highlighting the main issues contained within and the developmental journey of the Strategy. He further highlighted that should the Strategy be approved, a Culture Board for the city would be convened and the necessary work would be planned in order to deliver the identified priorities, reporting back on progress to Cabinet in due course.

Cabinet debated the report and key points raised and responses to questions included:

- The Strategy had not been written by Vivacity as it was a Council document. The Council needed to take a lead on the vision and development for the Strategy and to own and monitor the outcomes for the city;
- The mobile libraries had been un-affected by the recent cuts. This was positive for the rural villages;
- The pathway for young people was extremely important within the Strategy and the Heritage Skills Programme was already being successfully delivered, with two intakes into the programme;
- There would be creative apprenticeships and creative internships, coordinated by Peterborough Regional College;
- One of the main strands within Heritage was education. Numerous events were held at the Arena as well as the work that was undertaken at Sacrewell Farm;
- There was a need for the continuation of the dying arts, such as thatching and dry stone walling;
- The Strategy contained a strand called 'Community Bridge Builders', delivered by Peterborough Presents. This was to upskill community leaders, who in turn could assist people in their community to build their skills;
- A core delivery group called 'Culture Peterborough' was proposed, supported by a wide group of stakeholders, to take ownership of the Strategy and through to the next phase, the action plan;
- The Strategy highlighted a significant investment in culture and leisure in the city, contrary to reports in the press;
- The Strategy had been constructed in such a way that it should have no financial impact upon the Council, instead being delivered by a broad range of groups;
- The Council was looking to reduce the service fee from Vivacity, however since 2012, the Council had invested just under £800k into Culture, with legacy expected to come out of all investments. No additional funding was required;
- Peterborough Environment City Trust (PECT) were leading the heritage skills programme and a key partner in delivery;
- Creative engagement and participation formed part of the Strategy; and
- There were a vast array of events held in the city centre, these being great opportunities for celebrating diversity in the city.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED**:

To approve the Peterborough Culture Strategy 2015 – 2020 and to recommend its adoption to Council.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

To approve the proposed Peterborough Culture Strategy, replacing the current strategy which expired at the end of December 2014.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The only alternative option considered was to not revise the Strategy, however this would mean an outdated document, lacking focus on the Council's current priorities.

Councillor Hiller, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Services, took the Chair for the next item.

5. FUTURE OF WIND AND SOLAR PROJECTS

Cabinet received a report which followed an internal review by officers and consideration by the Cabinet Member.

The purpose of the report was to consider the way forward in respect of the two wind and three ground mounted solar PV projects namely:

- Farms of Newborough (wind and solar)
- Morris Fen (wind and solar)
- America Farm (solar only)

In October 2014, it had been stated that Cabinet would receive a report highlighting that the plans for wind and solar schemes at Newborough Farm, and Morris Fen in Thorney, were to be ceased and final evaluations were taking place to determine whether the third scheme at America Farm should progress.

As Chairman, Councillor Hiller addressed the meeting and proposed that no further action be taken in respect of America Farm due to the insufficient information available at the current stage. This was seconded by Councillor Seaton.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

1. To approve the cessation of the solar/wind projects at the farms of Newborough and Morris Fen and that the two planning applications be withdrawn;
2. That in respect of America Farm, no further action is to be taken due to the insufficient information available at this stage;
3. That in line with the Council's budget strategy, all cost be written off on the basis of a worst case scenario that the remaining scheme does not proceed.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

That the Farms of Newborough and Morris Fen schemes be ceased as a result of local opposition, planning and financial considerations.

That no further action be taken on the America Farm Solar Scheme due to the insufficient information available at the current stage.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

That the Farms of Newborough and Morris Fen solar and wind schemes be progressed. This was not deemed to be feasible due to the implications identified within the report. It was also not feasible to consider a reduced scheme in these locations for wind and/or solar for the same reasons.

That the America Farm solar scheme should not progress further and not be subject to final evaluation. However, the scheme was a potentially viable one and at the current stage further evaluation regarding the grid connection and associated costs needed to be conducted before any final decision should be made.

6. BUDGET 2015/16 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) 2024-2025

Cabinet received a report which formed part of the Council's formal budget process, as set out within the Constitution and legislative requirements, to set a balanced budget for 2015/16 and medium term financial strategy to 2024/25.

The purpose of the report was to recommend to Council budget proposals for 2015/16 through to 2024/25, in line with the final local government finance settlement for 2015/16 and in advance of some Department for Education specific grants being finalised. The draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) had been presented to

Cabinet on 19 January and, subject to updated information contained within the report dated 23 February 2015, was the basis for Cabinet to recommend the budget for approval by Council.

The report also provided an update on budget consultation responses received so far, recognising that the consultation remained open until 2 March and that some meetings with key stakeholder groups were still to take place.

Councillor Seaton, Cabinet Member for Resources, introduced the report and highlighted the main points contained within. This included the analysis on the feedback for the Phase 2 proposals and the recommendations for the Phase 2 proposals and Council Tax. There had also been an additional tabled document circulated to Cabinet which detailed further consultation responses received.

Councillor Seaton also proposed and advised of the following:

- An allocation of £70k from the risk management contingency to cover and assist with implementation of a staff presence at all times within the larger libraries in the city. This would widen the budget gap in future years;
- An increase in the capital sum for street cleansing equipment and litter bins of £200k to enable further investment to be made. This would have a modest impact on the revenue budget in the next year;
- The possible reformation of the Bus Working Group in order to look at the provision of additional bus services, following comments received from the Budget Working Group. No financial commitment to be given to this at the current time;
- The minimum level of financial contingency to be £500k with the additional proposals outlined above ensuring that the Council remained above that threshold;
- The business rate for the power station had been resolved for the 2005 valuation, however the 2010 valuation remained outstanding. There was no impact on the budget.
- The freeze on council tax would continue; and
- The consultation would remain open until 2 March 2015, and further feedback would be reported to Cabinet and Council.

Councillor Serluca, Cabinet Member for City Centre Management Culture and Tourism, provided an overview of the funding issues with regards to the libraries and the services that investment of £45k would enable, including receptionist posts during Open+ hours for the two libraries co-located with schools, Werrington and Orton, in order to support a full range of activities. At Bretton, an additional post to enable all three floors to remain open during Open+ times and at the Central Library a fourth post to meet increasing demand in the largest and busiest library across the network. The investment was ring fenced for these four libraries only, and Open+ would still be in operation in the four invigilated libraries, this being subject to the outcome of the current consultation. It was hoped that the four new roles would enable some of the staff proposed to be at risk to be redeployed. All library users would be invited to take part in consultation on the revisions to the model.

Cabinet debated the report and key points raised and responses to questions included:

- The Cabinet Members, and all involved in relation to the library proposals, were congratulated on the savings that had been made, whilst still extending services;
- The Cabinet Members, particular Councillor Seaton, and all officers involved in the delivery of the budget were congratulated on the work undertaken;
- The inclusion of the priority of delivering health and wellbeing for the city was commended; and

- The introduction of new technology into the libraries needed to be backed up by training opportunities and consideration could be given to putting libraries onto the website, if this was not being considered already.

Councillor Cereste thanked everyone for all their hard work on one of the most difficult budgets ever seen in the authority.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note the updates on the budget since the Cabinet's meeting on 19 January including: the announcement of the final Local Government Finance Settlement, the Council decision on 28 January of the Council Tax Support Scheme and the impact on the tax base.
2. Have regard to the consultation feedback received to date and statutory advice detailed in the report when determining the budget recommendations, noting that consultation remains open and further update will be provided at the Cabinet meeting and to the Council meeting.
3. Agree the budget proposals in this report, which include the updates detailed in paragraph 4.1 and additional proposals as agreed at the meeting, be approved and recommended to Council on 4 March 2015, namely:
 - a) The budget is set in the context of council priorities;
 - b) The budget for 2015/16 takes note of the budget monitoring position for 2014/15;
 - c) The revenue budget for 2015/16 and proposed cash limits for 2016/17 to 2024/25 (including investment and savings proposals);
 - d) The capital programme for 2015/16 and proposed cash limits to 2024/25 and associated capital strategy, treasury management strategy and asset management plan;
 - e) A council tax freeze in 2015/16 with indicative increases for planning purposes of 2% for 2016/17 to 2024/25;
 - f) That education funding is spent at the level of funding resources available to both schools and the council in 2015/16 and future estimates to 2024/25;
 - g) The budget is supported adequately with reserves, provisions and robust budget estimates set in the context of the risks outlined in the report;
 - h) The proposals for setting fees and charges for 2015/16;
 - i) To allocate £70,000 from the risk management contingency for 2015/16 to enable the library proposals to be amended to allow a staff presence at all times within the larger libraries across the city, and to assist with the implementation plans (noting that Cabinet will not make a final decision on library options until their meeting of 20thMarch);
 - J) To increase the capital sum for Street Cleansing by£200,000 in order to enable further investment into making services more efficient and to help keep our city clean; with the capital financing costs in 2015/16 of £4k being met from the risk management contingency, and
 - K) To maintain the risk management contingency at a minimum level of £500,000.
4. Note the approved and submitted declaration of the deficit on the Collection Fund with regards to business rates for 2014/15 and the business rates forecast for 2015/16.
5. Approve the discretionary retail relief scheme, the discretionary reoccupation relief scheme and the transitional relief scheme for businesses for 2015/16.
6. Have regard for the continuing uncertainty of national public finances and that it may become necessary to amend the budget in year if there are national changes to public spending following the general election in May.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The Council must set a lawful and balanced budget.

The Council was required to set a Council Tax for 2015/16 within statutory prescribed timescales and in accordance with the local referendum requirements contained within the Localism Act 2011.

Before setting the level of Council Tax, the Council must have agreed a balanced budget.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Budget proposals had been shared with the budget working group over the budget setting period. Some of the options that would have a relatively small financial impact had been rejected by Cabinet. Cabinet rejected these budget proposals on the basis that the proposals would be detrimental to public service delivery or impact on delivery of the council priorities following feedback from the budget conversation undertaken over the past few months.

Cabinet considered alternative council tax levels and for the reasons set out in the report recommend that the offer by government to freeze council tax represented the best value for the residents of Peterborough

MONITORING ITEMS

6. OUTCOME OF PETITIONS

Cabinet received a report following the presentation of a petition at the Council meeting of 28 January 2015.

The purpose of the report was to update Cabinet on the progress made in relation to this petition, this being:

- i) Fulbridge Road Allotments.

Councillor Seaton advised that issues at allotments across the city would be an area for consideration by the Budget Working Group during the next budget round.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED:**

To note the actions taken in respect of the petition presented to Council.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

As the petition presented in the report had been dealt with by Cabinet Members or officers, it was appropriate that the action taken was reported to Cabinet, prior to it being included within the Executive's report to full Council.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

There were no alternative options considered.

Chairman
10.00am - 10.45am